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9. — *Lucrezia Borgia. Nach Wekunden und Correspondenzen ihrer eigenen Zeit.* Von FERDINAND GREGOROVIVS. Stuttgart : Verlag der J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung. 1874. 2 vols. 8vo. pp. xvi, 329, 140. Portrait and Fac-similes.

No one of the figures of modern history has assumed so legendary a character as that of Lucrezia Borgia. Scarcely anything is known even now about the questionable portion of her career, her early life; and her infamy is based upon the assertions of an historian and two poets who did not live in Rome, and who had, moreover, political reasons for hating her family. The undoubted crimes of her father and brother were reflected upon her, and even their natural affection was construed into evidence of the most revolting immorality. When once public opinion had branded her as guilty of certain offences, it did not leave her until she had been made the modern type of female wickedness, and her portrait hung as a pendant beside that of her prototype, the notorious Messalina. The Reformation was no favorable time for attempting a rehabilitation of any member of the Borgia family; all know the fate of Machiavelli's *Principe*, which praised Cæsar for certain qualities which it would have been well had other Italians shared. Lucrezia's infamy then remained tacitly accepted, if not increased, until she fell into the hands of the Romantic school, and, hardest part of her posthumous fate, became the heroine of Hugo's play and Donizetti's opera.

It only required the most superficial investigation to see on how slight an historical foundation the fabric of Lucrezia's guilt had been built, and it is strange that its overthrow had not been earlier attempted by some of her own countrymen. It was, however, not until 1805 that Roscoe in an appendix to the "Life of Leo X.," attempted a refutation of some of the most shameful slanders directed against Lucrezia. This defence was wanting in documentary evidence and thorough research, and was regarded as a sentimental and chivalrous attempt to defend a woman who had failed to find a champion among her own countrymen. It was easy to show that if Guicciardini, Pontanus, and Sannazaro, who had not known her, and who, as we have hinted, had political reasons for hating the Borgias, had slandered her, Ariosto, Aldus Manutius, Bembo, and a host of others who had known her intimately had showered upon her splendid eulogies. This argument is not very strong. Mankind are

prone to take more interest in vice than virtue, and will be slow to accept a guiltless Lucrezia Borgia.

The question agitated by Roscoe was taken up in Italy, where a number of articles on the subject appeared in the various periodicals and separately. A complete biography was not published until 1869, and was the work of an Englishman, William Gilbert,* who used to advantage the materials accumulated by his predecessors in this field, but whose own superficiality and lack of method seriously impair the value of his work. This was the state of the discussion when there appeared, in 1870, the volume of Gregorovius, *Geschichte der Stadt Rom im Mittelalter*, which contained the period of Alexander VI.

The author had collected from the various archives of Italy a mass of precious materials which he could only partly employ in his great work. He determined to devote the rest to a monograph on the subject of Cæsar or Lucrezia Borgia. He decided in favor of the latter on account of his discovery in 1872, in the notarial archives of the Capitol at Rome, of a large number of important documents relating principally to Lucrezia, among them all her marriage contracts and other legal acts, throwing much light upon the family relations of the Borgias.

The result of his discoveries Gregorovius has given to the world in the work before us, the most complete and valuable contribution to the discussion, and, a few faults excepted, an almost perfect historical monograph. These faults are to be found in all of the author's previous works, and are briefly: unskilful use of his materials, prolixity, and an ardent imagination which leads him to supply from his own brain the gaps in his authorities. He is tireless in his researches, and has examined for the work before us not only the Roman archives, but those of Modena, Mantua, and elsewhere. Lengthy extracts from the documents found in these places are given in the text, and most of them are then printed *in extenso* in the Appendix, — a proceeding that increases the size and not the value of the work. In his desire to present a vivid picture of the events he is narrating, he loads his pages with useless details of ceremonies, giving at tiresome length the names and rank of unimportant persons. This minute narration at times seriously injures the unity of the work; for instance, when Lucrezia marries Giovanni Sforza, Lord of Pesaro, there follows a history

* Lucrezia Borgia, Duchess of Ferrarra. A Biography. By William Gilbert. London. 1869. 2 vols. 8vo.

of that petty state and a detailed description of the town. When Lucrezia goes to Nepi to mourn her second husband, Alfonso of Aragon, we have an account of Nepi, its scenery, and history of the castle, even to the inscriptions over the various portals. A more excusable digression is when, after Lucrezia's marriage to the Crown-Prince of Ferrara, the history of that state and city is given at length. These digressions, although impairing the unity of the work, are in themselves valuable and interesting, and might, like the extracts from documents, have been put into the form of notes, and thus relieved the text of much irrelevant matter.

Gregorovius's style is picturesque and attractive, and he never fails to give his readers a lively impression of events. His imagination is powerful, and at times gets the better of him, leading him into the frequent representation of supposed scenes which, it is true, if they had taken place, would probably have occurred just as the author describes them. It seems to us, however, that this habit is destructive to historical truth, and unworthy of a scientific work. An example or two will show what we mean. The author, after stating that no contemporary has left any description of Vanozza, Lucrezia's mother, adds: "We are at liberty to represent her to ourselves as one of those powerful and luxuriant figures which are still to be seen in Rome. They have none of the grace of the ideal women of the Umbrian artists, they possess something of the greatness of Rome; Juno and Venus seem united in them. They would resemble more closely the ideals of Titian and Paul Veronese, were it not for their black hair and dusky complexion. Blond and reddish hair has always been rare among the Romans."

So when he describes Lucrezia's childhood he says: "Lucrezia spent her early years without doubt in her mother's house. . . . We can easily imagine the arrangement of Vanozza's house, for there was but little difference in these things between the early Renaissance and the present day."

Then follows a description of the furniture, and the remark: "If Vanozza had any taste for antiquities, which we can only suppose in her because it was the fashion of the day, then such would not have been lacking in her salon."

On the 25th of July, 1492, Innocent VIII. died, and Rodrigo Borgia became a candidate for the Papacy. The contest between the rival candidates lasted until Rodrigo's election, August 11. Gregorovius's lively fancy immediately sees the future Pope's entire family (his niece Adriana Orsini, her daughter Julia Farnese, afterwards the

Pope's mistress, Vanozza and Lucrezia) importuning the saints with prayers and vows for the fulfilment of their hopes!

What, it will be asked, is the result of Gregorovius's investigations; has the question of Lucrezia's guilt or innocence been definitely settled?

We regret to be compelled to say that, without fault of the author, the result of his studies is merely a negative one. No evidence has yet been discovered which shows her complicity in the shocking crimes laid to her charge; while, on the other hand, no one can read Gregorovius's luminous account of the court of Alexander VI., and believe it possible for a person situated as was Lucrezia to preserve her purity and innocence. However, the facts of her life are here for the first time laid before the public in anything like completeness, and it has all the data necessary for forming a judgment tolerably satisfactory to each individual mind. Although Gregorovius has not made the startling discoveries we were led to expect, he has corrected many errors committed by earlier writers; even the date of Lucrezia's birth, the 18th of April, 1480, was not previously known with certainty. Her puzzling betrothals, their nullification, and her divorce are explained by the aid of newly discovered documents, and it is shown that many of the scandalous stories about her (especially her father's unnatural affection for her) were started by her first husband, Giovanni Sforza, her marriage with whom was dissolved under circumstances which bitterly exasperated him.

Lucrezia's life naturally divides itself into two parts, — her life at Rome, and at Ferrara, whither she removed in 1502 upon her marriage to the Crown-Prince of that state. The first division, it is needless to state, is the more interesting and important for the question of Lucrezia's guilt or innocence. For nearly twenty-two years she was under the direct control of her father and brother, most of the time the passive instrument of their ambition. She was married and divorced at their will; her first husband was taken up for political reasons, and dropped when he had lost his importance. Her second husband, Alfonso of Aragon, the most tragic figure in the book, was married from similar reasons, but could not be gotten rid of so easily. So Cæsar Borgia had him waylaid one night on the steps of St. Peter's and covered with wounds. The unhappy Duke managed to make his way to the Pope's chamber, where Lucrezia fainted at the sight of her bleeding husband. She tenderly nursed him, and with his sister Sancia (Lucrezia's sister-in-law, the wife of Don Jofré) cooked his food for fear of poison. The Venetian ambassador wrote to the Signoria: "It is not known who

wounded the Duke, but it is said that it is the same person who murdered the Duke of Gandia, and threw him into the Tiber." Cæsar Borgia, who is here intended, said to the same ambassador: "I did not attack the Duke, but if I had he would have deserved it." He even visited the invalid, and on leaving the room said, "What is not done at noon can be done at night." A few days after he came again in the evening, drove Lucrezia and Sancia from the room, and commanded one of his satellites to strangle his helpless brother-in-law. The body of the Duke was borne in silence to St. Peter's; and it gives us some idea of the small value set upon human life at that time, that the murder of a prince of the royal house of Naples aroused, as Gregorovius remarks, no more interest than the death of a Vatican groom. There is no doubt that Lucrezia loved her husband, and was terribly shocked by his tragic death, but it is one of the many proofs of her lack of deep feeling that within a year she dried her tears and began to think of another match. There are reasons to think that the marriage with Alfonso of Ferrara had been discussed in the Vatican during the lifetime of Lucrezia's unhappy husband, but there is no truth in Gibbon's statement ("Antiquities of the House of Brunswick," *Posth. Works*, Vol. II. p. 689), that "the marriage articles were signed, and as the bed of Lucrezia was *not then vacant*, her third husband, a royal bastard of Naples, was first stabbed, and afterwards strangled in the Vatican." Lucrezia's third marriage took place in the Vatican the 30th of December, 1501, and early in the following year she set out for Ferrara, where she remained until her death, seventeen years later. There can be no doubt of her exemplary life as Duchess of Ferrara, and it is useless to waste words on this part of her life. It is equally certain that all the slanderous stories (with one or two exceptions) circulated about her arose during the period of her Roman life, and we fear it will be impossible to make any one believe in her entire innocence during this time, although there is no foundation whatever for the outrageous accusations against her, as her unnatural affection for her father and brothers, her complicity in the death of the Duke of Gandia, etc.

In short, the Lucrezia Borgia of Gregorovius is a weak, characterless woman of a peculiarly amiable and winning disposition, who never would have been heard of if she had not been connected with the Borgia family. For many years she was the weak instrument of their ambition; when a happy change occurred and she was surrounded by a purer atmosphere, she easily fell into a totally different

life, and her later years were distinguished by piety and charitable deeds.

She died in 1519, deeply lamented by her husband and subjects. Two days before her death she dictated the following letter to Leo X., which we give, as we believe it has never before appeared in English.

MOST HOLY FATHER AND VENERATED LORD.

With all possible reverence of mind I kiss the sacred feet of your Holiness, and humbly commend myself to your holy Grace.

After having suffered greatly more than two months on account of a painful pregnancy, I gave birth, as it pleased God, to a daughter, the 14th of this month at dawn: and hoped after it that my illness would be relieved, but the contrary has happened, so that I am obliged to yield to Nature.

And so great is the favor that our most clement Creator has shown me, that I perceive that the end of my life is near, and that I shall have left it in a few hours, having first received all the holy Sacraments of the Church.

And at this point I have remembered as a Christian, although a sinner, to supplicate your Holiness to deign in your goodness to give me of your spiritual treasure some help, with your holy benediction, for my soul, and so I devoutly pray you.

And to your holy Grace I commend my husband and children, who are all your Holiness' servants.

In Ferrara, the 22d of June, 1519, in the xiv. hour.

Your Holiness' humble servant,

LUCREZIA OF ESTE.

(In the Archives of Modena.)

This letter is so quiet and dignified, so free from all excitement, that we can well ask with Gregorovius: "Could it have been written by a dying woman whose conscience was really burdened with the sins attributed to Alexander's daughter?"

10. — *The Poetical Works of THOMAS CHATTERTON. With an Essay on the Rowley Poems by WALTER SKEAT, and a Memoir by EDWARD BELL.* London: George Bell & Sons. 1875.

In a notice of Edgar Poe, Mr. Lowell pauses a moment to say that he "never thought the world lost more in the 'marvellous boy,' Chatterton, than a very ingenious imitator of antiquated dulness. When he becomes original (as it is called) the interest of ingenuity ceases and he becomes stupid." This criticism made one vaguely wonder whether the popular tradition or Mr. Lowell had estimated